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Performance and the Power of Midwives' Voices: Exploring Professional Identity

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School of Health and Life Sciences



Emergent Themes

Power
language hierarchy

Women
protection connection

Respect
honesty confidence

Informing Curriculum Development

An exploration of how student midwives define the concept of 'professionalism' and how they develop their professional identity during the midwifery programme.



"I was drawn to this drawing
Because I think being professional is
Being able to work in a team
Being able to work with and to have respect for
your colleagues
And treating everybody that you work with
Including every woman that you care for
With respect
That's a big part of professionalism"

Professionalism in the curriculum

This is a time of change: frameworks for maternity care are being refreshed in Scotland and across the UK and UWS is refreshing its midwifery curriculum.

In this project, student voices have emphasised tacit learning and peer pressure to conform to established norms, as strong influencers in the acquisition of professional values and identity. They also call for closer communication between university and practice teachers in midwifery education.



Research topic

Professionalism is multidimensional and socially constructed (Martimianakis et al. 2009). Within healthcare it is often described as an "art" complementing science (Van de Camp et al. 2004). Despite its complexity, educational programmes often frame professionalism as a list of individual attributes and behaviours: are there more effective approaches for teaching professionalism?

Being unprofessional....

Unprofessional behaviour is recognised but not always challenged by students in practice settings:

"I've learned more about *bad* professionalism.

All I can do is take it on board and say

It's never going to be me"



Theory and method

Semi-structured conversations with final year student midwives about professionalism within the theoretical and practical elements of their programme were facilitated by the midwifery researcher. Contributions were recorded for full transcription and thematic analysis.

Visual images were used to initiate and support the conversation. Drawing on theories from Schechner (1988) and Goffman (1959), performance was used to facilitate 'reinterpretation' and, thereby, deeper discussions around professionalism. In this poster we present outcomes from the first group of three students.

Performance

Conversations were transcribed 'in the moment' by one of the researchers and performed immediately after as poetry. This interpretation was then discussed and further discourse around the topic encouraged. Hearing their own words, students reported that this format facilitated deeper reflection and re-interpretation. It was also suggested that the emerging 'poetry' could be presented to other students as a starting point for discussion.



"I think I get a negative
Image of what professionalism is
This one's quite an
Aggressive and angry person
And I think
To be professional
You need to be
Calm and collected"

"In practice
Students stand at the door

In University you're told you're important
But in practice you're not

Senior midwives sit
Junior midwives stand
Students stand at the door"

...but "in my experience
everybody knows your name

Nurturing environment
What is that bubble
Why have they got it
That particular dynamic
That nurturing environment"

"The fast midwife
Ticking those boxes
Getting it all sorted

Mark the spot where you will be
That's not what's best for the women"

"Being in control
And not controlling
Some people don't feel in control
unless they are *controlling*
Being controlling to make life easier
Is *unprofessional*"